

**Fencing the seabed to protect sea scallops
(*Placopecten magellanicus*) from predation**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LISTE OF FIGURES.....	iv
ABSTRACT	v
RÉSUMÉ.....	v
1.0. INTRODUCTION	1
2.0. MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	1
3.0. RESULTS.....	4
4.0. DISCUSSION.....	5
5.0. SUMMARY.....	6
6.0. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	6
7.0. REFERENCES	7

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Location of study site in LeBlanc Harbour, West Arichat, Nova Scotia.....	1
Figure 2. Fence design modelled from Davis et al. (1980).	2
Figure 3. Fence was made with plastic covered wire mesh (a) with an overturned edge of galvanised steel (b) and was anchored with plastic milk crates filled with cement (c).	2
Figure 4. Scallop seeding (a) and seeded scallops in the enclosed area (b).....	3
Figure 5. The density (per m ²) of rock crab (<i>Cancer irroratus</i>), green crab (<i>Carcinus maenas</i>), sea star (<i>Asterias vulgaris</i>), toad crab (<i>Hyas araneus</i>) and moonsnail (<i>Euspira heros</i>) that were recorded and removed from May to end of August, 2002.....	4
Figure 6. Rock crab feeding on a scallop inside the enclosure (a); Pictures of gaps in the overturned edge of the fence (b & c); Pictures of a crab easily travelling along the fence (d).	5



ABSTRACT

Boudreau, R., R. Fougère, L.-A. Davidson and M. Niles. 2004. Fencing the seabed to protect sea scallops (*Placopecten magellanicus*) from predation. Can. Manuscr. Rep. Fish. Aquat. Sci. 2717: iv +7 p.

Sea Perfect Cultivated Products Ltd., a scallop farming company, often has excess scallop juveniles and wants to seed them on the bottom without being subjected to predation. The initial objectives of this project were: to compare the growth rate and survival of scallops cultured in lantern nets (currently used by Sea Perfect) with those cultured on a fenced-in seabed and to monitor and assess the presence of predators on the fenced-in seabed. A fence with an overturned edge was erected on the seabed on the scallop culture site near West Arichat, Nova Scotia. Predators within the enclosure were removed and measured. The scallops were then seeded within the enclosure after they were measured and counted. Scallops were also placed in the traditional lantern nets after they were measured and counted. The scallop density on the bottom (74.7 scallops /m²) was similar to the density found in the lantern nets (79 scallops /m²). Bi-weekly surveys and removals of the predators within the enclosure were conducted from May until the end of August 2002. Results indicated that the fence successfully prevented predators from entering the enclosure. However, in 2003, a gap in the overturned edge of the fence was observed. The seeded scallops were no longer present and high densities of predators were observed. As a result, no growth data were obtained. Fencing the seabed can be an effective technique for protecting scallops from predators; however fence maintenance is essential.

RÉSUMÉ

Boudreau, R., R. Fougère, L.-A. Davidson and M. Niles. 2004. Clôture du fond marin pour protéger les pétoncles (*Placopecten magellanicus*) contre la prédation. Can. Manuscr. Rep. Fish. Aquat. Sci. 2717: iv +7 p.

Sea Perfect Cultivated Products Ltd, une compagnie qui cultive le pétoncle, se retrouve souvent avec un surplus de pétoncles juvéniles, et il aimerait les ensemençés sur le fond marin sans être sujet à la prédation. Les objectifs de ce projet étaient: de comparer le taux de croissance et de survie des pétoncles cultivés dans les paniers lanternes (actuellement utilisés par Sea Perfect) avec ceux cultivés sur le fond marin clôturé et faire le suivi de la présence des prédateurs sur le fond marin clôturé. Une clôture avec un rebord a été installée sur le site de culture de pétoncle près de West Arichat, Nouvelle-Écosse. Les prédateurs sur le fond marin clôturé ont été retirés, comptés et mesurés. Ensuite, les pétoncles ont été ensemençés à l'intérieur de la clôture après avoir été mesurés et comptés. Des pétoncles mesurés et comptés ont aussi été placés dans les paniers lanternes traditionnelles. La densité des pétoncles sur le fond (74.7 pétoncles /m²) était similaire à la densité retrouvée dans les paniers lanternes (79 pétoncles /m²). Des suivis pour compter et retirer les prédateurs à l'intérieur de la clôture ont été effectués chaque deux semaines du mois de mai jusqu'à la fin du mois d'août 2002. Les résultats ont indiqués que la clôture était efficace à prévenir l'entrée des prédateurs dans l'enclos. Mais en 2003, des brèches dans le rebord ont été observées. Les pétoncles ensemençés n'étaient plus présents à l'intérieur de l'enclos et des hautes densités de prédateurs ont été observées. Par conséquent, aucune donnée de croissance n'a pu être obtenue. Clôturer le fond marin est une technique efficace pour protéger les pétoncles mais l'entretien de la clôture est essentiel.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

The economic feasibility of culturing scallops in suspension is often questioned because of the cost of labour and equipment required. In suspension, the growth and survival of scallops are dependent on the density of scallops (Parsons and Dadswell 1992). If a scallop farmer collects a surplus of scallop spat this does not necessarily mean increased profits. It is often the amount of culture equipment available that limits the number of scallop spat that can be retained.

In the past, excess scallops collected by Sea Perfect Cultivated Products Ltd. were seeded on the seabed of their culture site. Divers monitored for the presence of the seeded scallops, but, unfortunately, the seeded scallops were not found. The seeded scallop spat had either emigrated or succumbed to predation by rock crabs (*Cancer irroratus*) and sea stars (*Asterias* and *Leptasterias* species). One approach to minimizing predation or dispersal of scallop spat seeded on to the bottom is the use of a perimeter fence (David et al. 1980; Strand et al. 1999; Strand et al. 2003).

The initial objectives of this project were to:

- 1) Monitor growth rate and survival of cultured scallops i) in lantern nets (presently used) and ii) on a fenced-in seabed.
- 2) Monitor and assess the presence of predators on the fenced-in seabed.

2.0. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted on the seabed of Sea Perfect Cultivated Products Ltd. culture site in LeBlanc Harbour, West Arichat, Nova Scotia.



Figure 1. Location of study site in LeBlanc Harbour, West Arichat, Nova Scotia.

The fence design used in this study was similar to the one used by Davis *et al.* (1980) with an over-turned edge to prevent predators from climbing over the barrier and entering the fenced-in area (Figure 2).

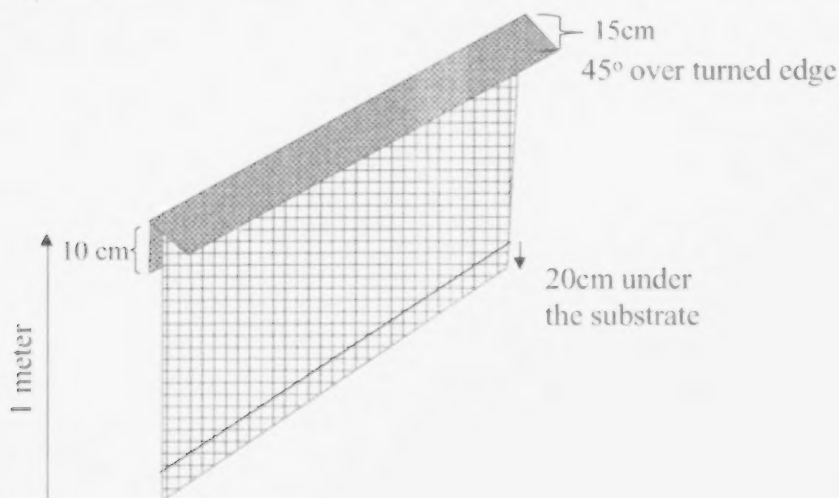


Figure 2. Fence design modelled from Davis *et al.* (1980).

The fencing was made of 38.1 mm plastic covered wire mesh (same material used in lobster traps) topped with a sheet of galvanised steel (27 gauge) that was overturned at a 45° angle. The section of the galvanised steel that was fastened to the fence measured 10cm and the overturned edge was 15cm. The fence was embedded 20 cm in the substrate and was approximately 1 m above the substrate. It was anchored and stabilised with plastic milk crates that were filled with cement and placed at each corner and at midway points. (Figure 3).

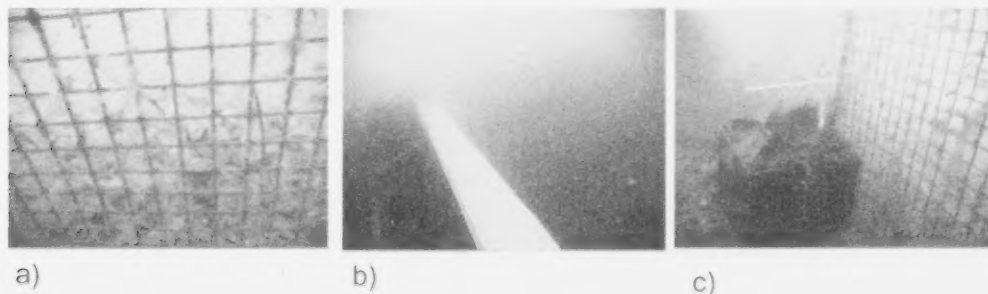


Figure 3. Fence was made with plastic covered wire mesh (a) with an overturned edge of galvanised steel (b) and was anchored with plastic milk crates filled with cement (c).

Most of the fence preparation and installation was conducted in the autumn of 2001; however, final completion occurred from May 5 to 8, 2002. The fenced-in area measured 18.3 m X 18.3 m which gave an enclosed seabed surface area of 334.5 m² for seeding.

On May 8, 2002, before seeding the scallops, the predators that were on the seabed within the fenced-in area, were removed. An estimated 25,000 scallops obtained from the 1999 spat collection were then seeded within the fenced-in area from May 13 to 17, 2002 (Figure 4).

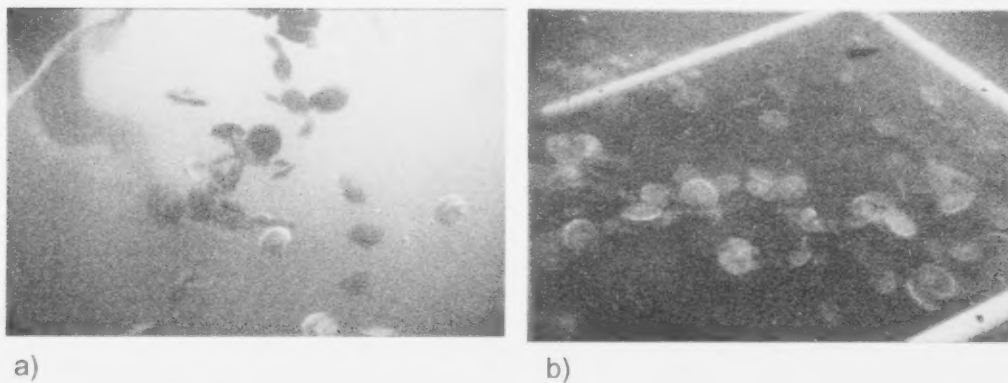


Figure 4. Scallop seeding (a) and seeded scallops in the enclosed area (b).

Scallops from the same year class were also placed in two lantern nets with ten levels each, one of the traditional culture nets used by Sea Perfect Cultivated Products, at a count of thirteen per level. The surface area of each level of the lantern net was 0.164 m² (diameter of 0.457 m).

Divers took video recordings of the seabed and the fence on May 17, 2002 on the last seeding day. Divers then visited the site bi-weekly from May until the end of August 2002 for the removal of the predators. Predators were stored in a freezer until they were counted and measured. Due to cold weather and ice coverage, the site was not surveyed during the winter 2002/2003. On July 9, 2003 divers again visited the survey site to assess the presence of predators and the abundance of scallops.

3.0. RESULTS

The initial shell height of the scallops that were seeded on the fenced-in site and those placed in the lantern nets was 45.7 mm (sd 4.8 mm). The scallops seeded on the seabed within the enclosure were estimated to be distributed at a density of 74.7 scallops /m² and the density in the lantern net was 79 scallops /m². Unfortunately, it was not possible to monitor the scallops placed in the lantern nets. All the scallops died shortly after the lantern net had been deployed on the culture site. Local culturists felt that the mortality was caused by an uncommon influx of fresh water.

In 2002, results of the predator surveys and removals indicated that the fence was 100% effective at preventing the moonsnail from re-entering the enclosed area. The other predators were able to find their way back in the enclosed area however they were found at lower densities (Figure 5). The survey conducted 10 days after the seeding indicated that the predators were found at densities 2 times lower then their original densities. As the bi-weekly predator surveys and removals continued, the predator level was reduced by a factor of 5 to 7 throughout July and August 2002.

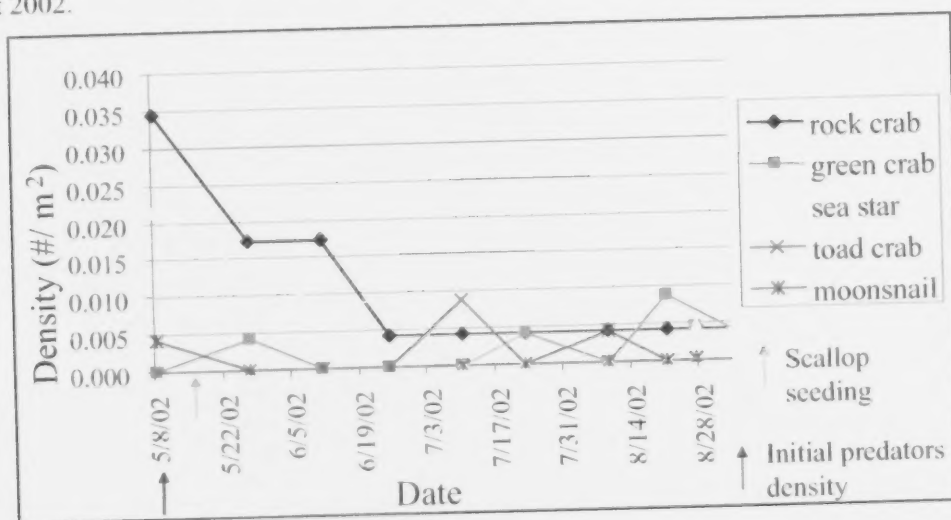


Figure 5. The density (per m²) of rock crab (*Cancer irroratus*), green crab (*Carcinus maenas*), sea star (*Asterias vulgaris*), toad crab (*Hyas araneus*) and moonsnail (*Euspira heros*) that were recorded and removed from May to end of August, 2002.

Predation of seeded scallops by rock crabs was observed (Figure 6a). Rock crabs were observed to easily travel on the fence (Figure 6b). In 2003, when divers visited the enclosed study site, there were gaps in the overturned edge of the fence (Figure 6c & d). Divers could not locate the seeded scallops and the density of crabs had returned to a high level of 0.020/m². Divers also observed many empty scallop shells in one corner of the enclosed study site. They felt that the current was responsible for gathering the empty shells in the same location.

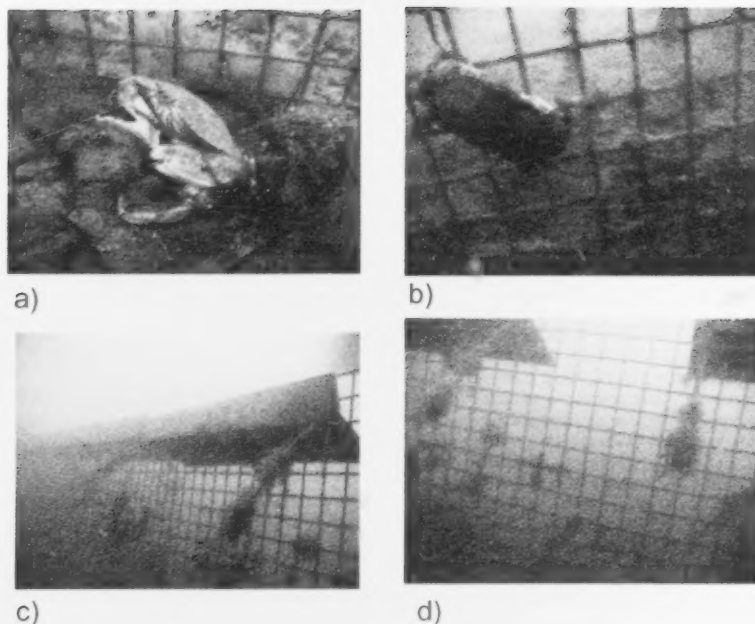


Figure 6. Rock crab feeding on a scallop inside the enclosure (a); Pictures of gaps in the overturned edge of the fence (b & c); Pictures of a crab easily travelling along the fence (d).

4.0. DISCUSSION

In this study, the initial results demonstrated that seabed enclosures can serve to prevent predators from accessing scallops within a fenced-in area. Davies et al. (1980) have successfully used fenced enclosures for the protection of mussel seed (*Mytilus edulis* L.) from predation by green crab (*Carcinus maenas* (L)). Similarly, Strand et al. (1999) demonstrated that it is possible to fence scallops on the seabed to prevent intrusion of the brown crab (*Cancer pagurus*).

The overturned edge seems to be effective at preventing predators from entering the enclosed area because high densities of crabs were observed on the enclosed sea-bed only when a gap in the overturned edge occurred. Unfortunately, during the winter of 2002/2003 certain sections of the overturned edge had separated forming gaps that allowed predators to enter the enclosure. This resulted in a complete loss of seeded scallops and hence did not allow for the collection of growth data.

Seabed enclosures are not a widely used technique, therefore its construction was a learning experience. Strand et al. (1999) also experienced maintenance problems. Their main problems were weak connections between fences and the catch of drifting seaweed, upon which the crabs climbed to pass over the fence. Strand et al. (2003) reported that recent technical improvements of the fences has improved the economic viability of fencing scallops on the seabed in Norway. In Canada, fencing the seabed with technically improved fences, with routine monitoring and maintenance, might also be a viable method of culturing scallops.

5.0. SUMMARY

- A fence with an overturned edge prevents predators such as moonsnail from re-introducing themselves into the enclosed seeding area.
- The density of predators such as crabs (toad, rock and green) and sea stars is reduced by a factor of 5 to 7 on a seabed that is enclosed with a fence with an overturned edge and a bi-weekly predator removal program.
- Crabs can easily climb fences therefore the overturned edge seems to be effective at preventing them from entering the enclosed area because high densities of crabs were observed on the enclosed sea-bed only when a gap in the overturned edge occurred.
- Technically improved fences, with routine monitoring and maintenance, for culturing scallops on the seabed should be investigated.

6.0. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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